

How to deal with teenage drinking and driving

A Parent's Guide





introduction

Most parents like to think that their teenager doesn't drink. But, teenagers do drink. And, they're beginning to do so in larger numbers and at earlier ages.

Reports of teenage drinking and driving are increasing at an alarming rate. And the results of this "mix" are quite clear. Nearly 8,000 young Americans are killed each year in alcohol-related accidents.

In Pennsylvania, more than 20 percent of all alcohol-related fatal highway accidents involve teenagers.

what can parents do?

Many attempts to reduce teenage drinking and driving haven't worked very well.

Horror stories of accidents, accompanied by pictures of crumpled cars and bloody bodies, seem to turn adolescents off. Many feel, "It won't happen to me."

Restrictions on the use of the car or choice of friends also have limited effect. Teenagers are pretty much on their own when the car leaves the driveway.

communication is the key

Honest, two-sided communication between you and your teenager is the key to dealing with this problem.

A recent nationwide survey conducted for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that teenagers expect and want their parents to talk with them about drinking and driving.

Each situation, each adolescent and each parent is different, so no one set of rules for communicating fits every case. You must decide what approach will be most effective with your own child.

prepare yourself

Before sitting down with your teenager for a talk on drinking and driving, read as much as you can on the subject. Some hard facts may be helpful in answering your child's questions.

Honestly explore your own behavior and thoughts concerning drinking and driving before you discuss it with your child.



suggestions

Here are some pointers that have helped other parents talk with their teenagers about drinking and driving:

- Don't lecture. Be honest in expressing your feelings and values. Encourage your son or daughter to do the same.
- Be firm, calm and consistent. Remember that you're sharing ideas and information about drinking and driving. Don't put your teenager on the witness stand and demand a confession.
- Be a good listener, even if you don't agree. Tell your teenager that you want to hear what he has to say about drinking and driving.

some general points to talk about

- Emphasize that you are not concerned about the car but with your teenager's life. Tell your child that you will pick him up anywhere and at anytime when he has been drinking too much and needs transportation home.
- Ask your son or daughter about what can be done when a friend has had too much to drink and insists on driving. Suggest that your teenager offer to drive the car for the friend or tell him to call you.
- Discuss the legal aspects of drunk driving. Tell your teen he can be arrested by police if caught driving under the influence of alcohol. Point out that under Pennsylvania law he could lose his driver's license for six months to a year if convicted of drunk driving.





show good example

Back up your discussion with example. If you act responsibly when drinking, chances are your son or daughter will follow suit.

Here are a few tips:

- Never be afraid to say, “No thanks, I’m driving,” when offered that extra drink.
- When entertaining at home:
 - Don’t mix drinks too strong.
 - Serve food along with alcoholic beverages.
 - Don’t hurry to refill empty glasses.
 - Close the bar at least one hour before guests depart.
 - Don’t be afraid to refuse another drink to a guest who has had too many.
 - Restrain any guest who has had too many drinks from driving home, even if you have to take his car keys.
- Explain to your child why you are taking these steps. Tell him you care about the safety of your friends, even though it is sometimes embarrassing to take the above actions.

reinforce responsible actions

Remember that one discussion with your child on drinking and driving or one social situation where you act responsibly in front of your child, will not completely solve the problem.

As occasions present themselves, reinforce your teenager's learning through continued good example. Also keep the channels of communication open so your son or daughter can initiate more discussions.

When your teenager has acted responsibly in a difficult situation, show your approval. That approval may give your child the confidence to resist peer pressure and not "go along with the crowd."

for more information

Get a copy of "Drinking and Driving — A Guide For Prevention" and "Keep the Life of the Party Alive." Write to—

The Governor's Traffic Safety Council
Transportation and Safety Building
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120



GTSC

GOVERNOR'S TRAFFIC SAFETY COUNCIL

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